

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5565
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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSYHSANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 3342

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, AR
SUBJECT: JUNTA REPORTED NEAR TO PROCLAIMING VIDELA
"FOURTH MAN"

REF: BUENOS AIRES 3288

1. AS A RESULT OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SERIES OF MEETING, APRIL 28 AND 29, BY 23 HIGH-GANKING OFFICIALS FROM THE THREE BRANCHES OF THE ARMED FORCES, THE DEADLOCK WHICH ENSUED IN THE LAST MEETING OF THE MILITARY JUNTA ON APRIL 27 REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN BROKEN AND THERE IS NOW UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT AMONG THE THREE SERVICES THAT GENERAL VIDELA SHOULD CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT DURING THE SECOND PHASE OF THE NATIONAL REORGANIZATION PROCESS. A WELL PLACED NAVY SOURCE INFORMS US THAT THE JUNTA WILL ANNOUNCE AFTER ITS MEETING SCHEDULED FOR 1800 HOURS TODAY (MAY 2) THAT GENERAL VIDELA WILL BECOME THE
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"FOURTH MAN" PRIOR TO AUGUST 1. ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE, VIDELA'S SECOND TERM OF OFFICE WILL TERMINATE MARCH 29, 1981. (WE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THAT VIDELA'S NEW TERM WOULD BEGIN OCTOBER 1.)

2. THE NAVY SOURCE CONFIRMS REPORTS WE HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER QUARTERS, HOWEVER, THAT AGREEMENT HAS NOT

BEEN FULLY REACHED CONCERNING THE PRESIDENT'S POWERS VIS-A-VIS THE JUNTA DURING HIS NEXT TERM OF OFFICE. THIS ISSUE REPORTEDLY WILL CONTINUE TO BE DISCUSSED BY THE SECRETARIES GENERAL OF THE THREE SERVICES. ACCORDING TO OTHER REPORTS WE HAVE, THE OVERALL TRIUMVIRATE DISTRIBUTION OF PATRONAGE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AMONG THE THREE SERVICES WILL CONTINUE DURING THE NEXT PHASE OF GOVERNMENT. WE DO NOT YET KNOW HOW THIS WILL AFFECT VIDELA'S REPORTED DESIRE TO APPOINT NEW CIVILIAN ADDITIONS TO HIS CABINET AND THE STATE PROVINCIAL GOVERNORSHIPS, ALTHOUGH PRESUMABLY IT MEANS THAT, E.G. IF VIDELA WISHED TO NAME A CIVILIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, HE WOULD REQUIRE THE PRIOR APPROVAL OF THE THREE SERVICES (AND IN THIS CASE ESPECIALLY THAT OF THE NAVY).

3. ACCORDING TO OUR NAVY SOURCE, ADMIRAL MASSERA DOES NOT INTEND TO RETIRE AS NAVY COMMANDER UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1978 WHICH, IF THESE REPORTS ARE CORRECT, WOULD MEAN THAT VIDELA WILL TAKE OFFICE FOR HIS SECOND TERM WITH MASSERA STILL IN THE JUNTA, TO WHICH VIDELA TECHNICALLY AT LEAST WOULD BE SUBORDINATE FOR A PERIOD OF ABOUT A MONTH.

4. IT IS ALSO APPARENT THAT VIDELA'S CHOICE FOR HIS SUCCESSOR AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMY, GENERAL VIOLA, CONFIDENTIAL

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HAS NOT YET BEEN APPROVED--OR EVEN FORMALLY PROPOSED OR CONSIDERED WITHIN THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND AS YET.

5. COMMENT: THE APPARENT RESOLUTION OF THE "FOURTH MAN" CANDIDATE THROUGH THE EXTRAORDINARY DEVICE OF A "JUNTA GRANDE" MEETING CONSISTING OF 9 MAJOR GENERALS, 8 VICE ADMIRALS AND 6 AIR FORCE BRIGADIERS AT A MOMENT WHEN INTER-SERVICE RANCOR HAD REACHED A NEW LEVEL, DEMONSTRATES A SHARED CONCERN THAT THE SERVICES COULD NO LONGER TOLERATE THE IMAGE OF INDECISION WHICH WAS BEING PROJECTED. WE PROBABLY SHOULD NOT READ TOO MUCH INTO THIS RARE MOMENT OF CONSENSUS. INDEED, AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT, MAJOR ISSUES REMAIN UNRESOLVED, BUT THE AGREEMENT REPORTEDLY REACHED IS A WELCOME EVENT WHICH COULD, AT LEAST MOMENTARILY, REINSPIRE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS CAPABLE OF POLITICAL DIRECTION. WE VIEW THIS REPORTED AGREEMENT OVER VIDELA'S SELECTION AS AN ESSENTIAL STEP TOWARD BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF EVENTUAL POLITICAL NORMALIZATION IN ARGENTINA. END COMMENT.
CASTRO

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